



Office of The Attorney General
State of Connecticut

TESTIMONY OF
ATTORNEY GENERAL RICHARD BLUMENTHAL
BEFORE THE PUBLIC HEALTH COMMITTEE
MARCH 3, 2008

I appreciate the opportunity to support Senate Bill 459, An Act Promoting the Early Detections, Diagnosis and Treatment of Lung Cancer, Breast Cancer and Cervical Cancer.

Just as Connecticut led the court fight against Big Tobacco, we must use the resources we won to fight deadly tobacco addiction, particularly among children. There is a strong clear need for tobacco education, cessation and prevention programs. Each year, 4,800 Connecticut children begin smoking -- on average at 11 years old. Almost one in five Connecticut children smoke and 76,000 of them will die prematurely from a smoking related illness. Last year, more than 10,000 people -- in one month -- sought assistance to quit smoking through the Quitline smoking cessation program.

Despite tobacco's continued deadly grip on our state, and Big Tobacco's unrelenting pursuit of our children, Connecticut ranked dead last in the nation in using tobacco settlement funding for tobacco education and cessation programs. Our state received an 'F' on the American Lung Association's report card for funding such critical programs.

The state has a moral obligation to spend a significant portion of the tobacco settlement dollars on tobacco cessation and prevention programs. Helping smokers to quit is also sound policy - making their lives longer and more productive, and reducing health care costs. The state's failure to spend more than a small fraction of the tobacco settlement money to fight tobacco addiction betrays the purpose of our historic legal victory, and the needs of smokers whose very lives depend on cessation programs. It has also given Connecticut the odious distinction of ranking last nationally in spending to fight tobacco.

We have the financial resources -- \$140 million every year from Big Tobacco -- to fund a strong tobacco cessation and education program to prevent children from beginning and aid smokers in breaking the addiction. The Centers for Disease Control recommends that Connecticut spend \$22 million on effective tobacco cessation and education programs.

Section 2 of Senate Bill 459 allocates \$15,750,000 from the Tobacco and Health Trust Fund for funding the Connecticut Comprehensive Cancer Plan. A major component of the Plan comprises funds for tobacco cessation and education programs. The Cancer Plan was developed under the leadership of the American Cancer Society with input from health care providers, tobacco prevention agencies, state and local government officials, health care institutions and many others.

I urge the committee -- for the sake of our children -- to approve this allocation as a major step toward meeting the CDC goal of \$22 million.